



National Volunteer Fire Council

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September 23, 2004

The Honorable John Larson
1005 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Larson:

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is a non-profit membership association representing the more than 800,000 members of America's volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. Organized in 1976, the NVFC serves as the voice of America's volunteer fire personnel in over 28,000 departments across the country. On behalf of our membership, I would like to express our support for your legislation, *the Nursing Home Fire Safety Act (H.R. 4967)*.

In 2003, multiple death nursing facility fires in Connecticut and Tennessee claimed 31 lives. These tragedies have resulted in a reassessment of current national codes and standards used to regulate fire safety in nursing facilities, including proposed changes to the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) Life Safety Code to require automatic fire sprinklers be installed in all nursing facilities nationwide. Currently, the national codes and standards used by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to regulate fire safety in nursing facilities require sprinklering in newly constructed or renovated nursing facilities, but not in all existing facilities.

According to NFPA, out of approximately 17,000 nursing homes in the U.S., 25% (approximately 4,000) do not have a sprinkler system. Based on NFPA fire data, there has never been a multiple death fire in a fully sprinklered nursing facility. From 1983 to 2002, in non-sprinklered facilities, there was an average of one fire death per year. For the past ten years, the average has been 0.3 deaths per year. None-the-less, the only way to virtually eliminate multiple death fires is to ensure that all nursing facilities are equipped with automatic fire sprinklers. Unfortunately, many state governments lack requirements for nursing homes to be equipped with sprinklers.

Your important legislation requires that any nursing home participating in Medicare or Medicaid be fully equipped with an automatic fire sprinkler system within 5 years. In addition, the bill requires these nursing homes to be reimbursed by the federal government, through Medicare and Medicaid, for the costs of sprinkler systems installed after September 11, 2003.

In addition, it allows states to establish earlier deadlines for the installation of fire sprinklers and prevents nursing homes from collecting tax benefits on the depreciation value of a sprinkler system that is paid for through the reimbursement program. When completed, this work will drastically enhance the safety of the more than one million residents now receiving quality care in our nation's nursing facilities.

Once again, the NVFC fully supports this legislation and we look forward to working with you to pass this legislation in the 108th Congress. The NVFC commends you for your continued dedication to the enhancement of fire safety for our nation's citizens. If you or your staff have any questions feel free to contact Craig Sharman, NVFC Director of Government Relations at (202) 887-5700 ext.12.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip C. Stittleburg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philip C. Stittleburg
Chairman

cc: NVFC Board of Directors